

Eastern MRS Meeting Notes  
March 19, 2008  
Lenoir County Agricultural Extension

Counties Present: Bladen, Brunswick, Cumberland, Duplin, Franklin, Halifax, Harnett, Nash, New Hanover, Onslow, Pitt, Robeson, Sampson, Wake, Wilson.

Introductions

Announcements

Changes in the CFSR

Follow up on FA findings or Contributory Factors

CDSA Referrals

Who to refer

Screening tool

Announcements

- Structured Documentation – Presented to Children's Services - received overwhelming support. Was approved at Children's Services committee, then passed up to executive board, where it was approved as well. The instrument will begin statewide July 1<sup>st</sup>. Currently has only been developed for assessments, has not gone into Foster Care and adoptions yet but hope to expand that quickly. Hope to get template on the web by April 1<sup>st</sup> so that counties who need to develop IT around it or manage incorporating it into existing documentation structure will have adequate time to do so. It will be mandatory to use this format. Akin to structured intake – the format is required, a template is provided if counties wished to use it, but if you want to use a different format in your county you may as long as you include all the information that is in the template.

Will probably put this on the agenda for the May meeting so we can discuss it before it becomes mandatory.

- Foster Care documentation tool was also approved. (This was discussed more completely last month – notes on that discussion and a template of the tool is included in February's meeting notes.)
- Confidential Intermediary policy was also passed. There are currently 3 confidential intermediary consultants at the Division.
- Court Involvement - Revising Chapter 8 to make this piece its own section to cover 210, 215 and 109. Will also be doing the same with Child and Family teams.
- CFT training is now required for all workers. Facilitator training required if you facilitate cases. (see February's notes for more information on this as well).

Changes in the CFSR

Part of the ongoing reform effort is a revision of our CFSR. Ongoing, continuous improvement will serve to make every agency stronger. In that vein, with the help of some counties the Division revised our CFSR protocol. One of the things we are trying to do is

move away from the idea that this is just a score that you get on a review, and move to the idea that this is a way that you can improve services in your community.

Dora Ann Carter from the review team presented on the new CFSR tool.

Changes to the CFSR process – there is an entire training presentation that the Review team gives around the state. Will be upcoming training in Cartaret and Guilford. Now county staff are require to take the training before their review.

- NC had a Federal Review in March 2007.
- NC Passed one Outcome – Education.
- Passed 5 of 7 Systemic Factors – failed Court and Services Array.
- As a result of that, we changed our process so that we looked more like the Federal process.
- The state review team looked at things differently than the federal reviews. Decided that they wanted to get training from the federal reviewers. Some of the review team went to Atlanta to get training from them. Took two cases and got training from the Feds to see if they could teach us to review in the way they do.
- Got some clarification, and will change the process as well as the way that we rated things.
- The problem was that the results of the NC review differed greatly from the feds. Seems NC was not being strict enough. NC has a debriefing session and if we rated something as an area of needing improvement, and counties felt it was a strength and could make a good enough case, NC tended to give counties the benefit of the doubt. This resulted in a lot of changes because the Feds were stricter.
- NC will now have an internal review process.
- New process where 7 pilot counties will have an internal review. One of these counties, Onslow, was here. Catawba, Lincoln. Orange, Cartaret, Buncombe some of the other pilot counties.
  - Onslow said their first internal review was last month, using new forms, at this point looking at doing a PIP for well being needs. Supervisors reviewed cases in program areas that they did not supervise. Have another one planned in July.
- If the pilot of the Internal Review goes well, it may go statewide.
- Other counties will have regularly scheduled CFSRs. The pilot counties will have theirs at the end of the cycle we just began.
- Change to how we are doing jurisdictional cases. All service areas will be considered in jurisdictional cases. Counties will request the records from the other county and have them available for the on-site review. The only people who will be interviewed are the social worker and the supervisor. Division will tell the other county what their findings are before they leave. They will rate each county on the part they played in the case.
- Where are cases pulled from?
  - Review team will request a list of jurisdictional cases and send it to the county. This will require the counties to develop a log or some means of tracking jurisdictional cases and identify the counties that they worked with.
  - Cases open for 60 days within the review period (with the exception of assessments because they are not open for 60 days but will be included).

- Has been some question if conflict cases will be included. At this time yes, but there has been some discussion about changing this.
- When review occurs, whichever counties have a jurisdictional case being reviewed, if they are found to need improvement, there may be a program improvement plan for both counties. Before they leave the county they are reviewing, both counties will know that the case has been reviewed and how the case was rated.
- Review team will be looking more closely to ensure that CFTS are occurring. (Item 18 the case planning question in the tool.) Ensuring that case plans are developed with families, were parents involved (and children where appropriate). How often did meetings occur?
- Have found that CFTs are called different things throughout the state. The review team will look at the meeting to ensure that if it was called a CFT is truly was a CFT and not just a meeting. Must be able to see that the family was involved, their supports were there, some evidence that you made an effort to include the supports for the family, and that there was effort made to accommodate the family's schedule. In the past there was not as much of an emphasis on this, but there will now be a large focus on CFTs.
- There will be less room for debate/negotiation at the debriefing. There is still the option of calling Raleigh to settle a disagreement, but so far this has not happened. The trainings are very comprehensive and counties know what to expect when the review team comes.
- No one has passes all outcomes as of yet, only review 5 or 6, but one county passed 6 outcomes.
- CPRs will not review cases but they will be on site. This is a change, their main role will now be to observe the process and assist with coordination and be available to begin working with counties on a program imp plan if necessary
- Reports must be initiated timely by counties. This was always true, but we took diligent effort into account. We will not take diligent effort into account, the case must be initiated (only exception is if Law Enforcement is involved and they request that we not initiate immediately).
  - Question - If you are in program improvement because you didn't initiate timely because the family went to the beach or something, how would you fix that?
    - Some discussion at the state that you wouldn't have to have a program improvement plan if this was the only thing that you were rated 'needs improvement' on because we realize that there would be nothing you could do in a situation like this. This would only apply if you have the diligent efforts documented about why you could not initiate.
- Repeat maltreatment will be looked at differently – will look at the number of reports over the life of the case. If, in the review period, you have a Substantiation or Services Needed finding and within 6 months before or after you have another one, that is repeat maltreatment - period. In the past if it was a different perpetrator or different allegations it was not repeat maltreatment, but now it will be even if it was a totally different situation.

- Adoption & Safe Families Act. NC law says you must have an exception or file a TPR petition within 12 months. Federal law says 15 months. Now we will be rating on the 12 months. Want to be sure that you file the TPR petition within 12 months and the petition is in the records. If you are not going to file the exception needs to be included in the court order.
- If court ordered concurrent plan – work has to be done for both the permanent plan and the concurrent plan. The review team will rate both plans, whereas previously only rated one.
- APPLA (Another Permanent Planned Living Arrangement) – for teenagers where it is difficult to identify a plan for. No realistic options out there for a child who is 16 and will probably age out. The feds were concerned that we did not have long term foster care as a plan. The feedback was that we needed a plan like this. NC working on developing a plan for these children.
  - There is an internal workgroup working on developing this. After developed internally it will be passed to the folks on the court workgroup.
- Focus on ICWA – preserving connections. Indian Child welfare Act requires that for placement cases an inquiry has to be made into the child's native American heritage. We did not do well on that, so we are focusing on this area. Want to ensure that social workers have made inquiries into the child's potential Native American heritage. Looking for documentation that an inquiry has been made into this heritage and not just checked "no" on the form.
  - Question – The understanding is that the act only applies to nationally recognized tribes. What about those that are not nationally recognized? Also counties need guidance on what they are supposed to do if someone says "yes" but no one has any idea how to trace several generations ago with no names or anything. NC Law says that even for non-federally recognized tribes, we must include the tribe in the child welfare processes.
- Maternal and paternal relatives must be considered. The real concern has been lack of contact with fathers living outside the home. However this applies to both parents and their relatives. The agency must make an effort to determine the identity of the father if mother is not forthcoming.
- Efforts to involve both parents must be made and must be ongoing. Lack of efforts to involve fathers affect ratings of multiple items on the tool. If work with either of these parents did not occur and there is not documentation to document regular and ongoing attempts to contact and encourage involvement, several items will be rated as needed improvement. Used to only rate one item about this, but now will affect multiple items. This applies for assessment, in-home cases, and foster care cases. They will take into account where the parent resides when determining if there was sufficient involvement (out of state will not be held to the same standard as someone who lives across town.) However there must be some involvement no matter what - even if someone is in prison for 50 years out of state there needs to be phone calls or letters.
  - Question - If the case is ready to be closed for assessment and the father has never been involved, and the case will be unsubstantiated, how much time to

you hold the case open while you are looking for dad who has never been a part of the life – this becomes intrusive to the family.

- Don't hold the case open just to find Dad in an assessment case. Just document that you were making efforts, but if there is no way to find him by the time you close the case and the case is not mandatory services go ahead and close the case and document your diligent effort to find dad.
- Face to face visits with children and parents must be made by a DSS social worker, those made by a contractual agency will not be counted – exception is Vanguard or other agencies that provide actual social worker staff. Those staff will be considered employees of the agencies. If you contract with Vanguard to fill a position, those visits will count. If the only reason you contract with them is to do visits, and the case manager is still a permanent employee with the agency then these visits won't count. *In order for their visits to count, the Vanguard employee must hold case management responsibility for that child* – but you can contract with Vanguard to be the case manager for a child instead of just to do the visits. (No longer ok for them to have the contracting agency to make visits monthly and the agency social worker just see the child quarterly.)
  - Waiting on clarification for ICPC – but we are not looking at a requirement that you actually send a worker to another state to make a visit, just that you know where the children are and that they are safe. Not planning to count against you if you don't go the other state.
  - If they are placed in treatment facilities in VA or SC would the visits have to be monthly or quarterly? Not sure, she will find out.
- All children who are cognitively and emotionally able, must be involved in case planning. Not necessarily specifically a signature on the case plan, but clear evidence of involvement in the process and the meetings. Signatures are good, but not the only evidence of involvement. Previously it was children 12 and over, now this has been expanded.

#### Any follow up on FA or Contributory Factors?

Last month the eastern meeting did not get a chance to discuss Family Assessment findings thoroughly. Still had a few questions regarding this. One of the things that came out at the review was a need for clarification of Family Assessment findings.

- What are people doing when you have a Substantiation or In Need of Services (in other words, the family is currently in 215 services) and services are in place and another report comes in? There is a lot of variety because county staff are confused about how to handle this and also concerned about how to make clear to the family why there may be two different findings when they are already in 215.

County responses:

- If its during the assessment, roll it into one finding – if they are in 215, they make the second case decision solely on the base of the findings for the second report. They would make a second finding of Substantiated or Services Needed even though there are currently services in place.
- Another county said they would say services recommended because there are already services in place.

- Depends on if the second report is for the same issue or a different issue. If it is a new issue, a new mandatory service finding would be put into place.
- The family may not be able to distinguish between the two findings if one is Services Needed (for substance abuse) versus No Services Needed (for a dirty house while they are in 215 for the SA) – but, the allegation of dirty house shouldn't result in mandatory services.
- If there was a new report – and the risk assessment for the second assessment comes up high, wouldn't that play into your case decision?

### Contributory Factors

Are we filling them out? Most people said yes.

Many contributory factors require some sort of diagnosis which makes it difficult to get within a 45 day time frame for the assessment. Some type of cases (sex abuse) have no appropriate contributory factors.

How would you capture sexual abuse?

- Some of the factors do not relate to the findings – i.e. if the family is in public housing that is indicated, but just because something is present, does not mean that it contributed to the finding.

As we provide our NCANDS data, the feds pointed out that we don't have a "none" for a choice so they suggested we look into our factors.

- If we are leaving these blank many times, are we leaving it blank because we don't feel that any of the choices accurately capture the situation, or just that we aren't doing it?
- Has been a suggestion to have something that does not require a diagnosis. But if we all just check those and never the ones from the feds, we won't have anything to report to the feds.

### CDSA referrals

- Dear county director letter came out discussing these changes. Section 1408 page 23 and Section 1412 page 7 have the policy.
- Early Intervention, Public Health, along with a Work Group met to discuss the referral process. Concerned that referrals were being generated that were inappropriate or there were no early intervention needs identified, and this was creating increased work for Early Intervention staff. Spent a lot of time tracking to track down families who either didn't need services or would refuse to accept services.
- Decision was made to ask Child Welfare workers to do a partial screening for CDSA – would not be doing the actual screening that Early Intervention staff would do, would do a pre-screening process. In the family strengths needs assessment if you have any identification of a need for item S6 (child characteristics) you can make a referral to CDSA if the finding is substantiated or services needed, or if in your professional opinion this child could benefit from CDSA services. Not removing all of the discretion, but giving guidance (can still refer if S6 is not identified as a need).
- If S6 is a need and there is a finding of Substantiation or Services Needed you have to refer.
- If S6 is not a need, can still refer.

### Other Discussion – Questions and Possible Topics for Future Meetings

- Updated family strengths and needs assessment – the question that asks about history (S8?) used to ask about a 5 year history, now it asks about any history all year. The instructions include S8 section “d” but “d” is missing on the form. At this point, you can write it in, Patrick believes that we are aware of this and “d” was left off when the form was added to the web.
- Structured Decision Making tools - The Division has contracted with Children's Research Center to come to NC and evaluate the structured decision making tools. We will be sending the tools as they are to the Children's Research Center to have them run some validation tests. (We borrowed these tools from Minnesota – where they were validated for their population, which is not demographically similar enough to ours to ensure that the tools are valid for NC.)
- Asked if people here would be interested in bringing Jane Thompson and Kirk Randleman (Division attorneys) in for one of these meetings to talk about ICWA? Some counties have already heard this in Regional Supervisor meetings.
- Regarding the jurisdiction policy – the county who screens the report only decides if it is abuse or neglect. The county that it is given to decides the response time and the track. The receiving county is to contact the other county within two hours. Counties said that Terri has said this is not in the manual but was working on a change. Need clarification if this is correct.
- Structured Documentation forms – will there be training? Patrick will talk to CPRs when they get together and basically do a train the trainer with them before they go to the counties. Will have parts of it on the MRS agenda for April and May. Primarily the policies with the instrument will be the training. Work group made a considerable effort to make these policies as clear as possible.
- Would like a meeting topic discussing CFT when you are looking at a child coming into care. What do these look like, how are you doing them?
- Moral turpitude reports – do counties send those to law enforcement and DA? One county's law enforcement is saying that they are no longer investigating these reports because they have discarded that from their policy. (Example: parents giving kids drugs – might look at it as contributing the delinquency of a minor, but not moral turpitude.) DSS still sending the referrals, despite the fact that law enforcement isn't taking them.
  - Bladen county gets the majority of their moral turpitude from Law Enforcement.
  - Another county has had Law Enforcement say that they are not going to do emotional abuse.
- Would also like to discuss the connection between Juvenile Court and our cases. Dual jurisdiction cases.

### April meetings:

Central: Guilford Co DSS – April 22<sup>nd</sup>

Western: Asheville, AB Tech - April 14<sup>th</sup>

East: Edgecombe DSS Tarboro Office – April 15<sup>th</sup>